EMBASSY OF THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA
MEXICO CITY, MEXICO

November 2003

ANTONIO O. GARZA, JR.
AMBASSADOR

To My American Business Friends:

The recent WTO meeting in Cancun has once again put trade at the forefront of international relations. The importance of focusing on trade as the principal means to ensure growth and development is now more apparent than ever. Expanded trade brings jobs, investment, and expertise into developing countries, and through increased integration into the global market, allows developing countries to benefit from the rising tide of global prosperity. As President George W. Bush stated in his first address to the U.S. Congress, "Free trade brings greater political and personal freedom."

Nowhere is the importance of free trade to economic development more evident than in Mexico. Since the markets of the United States, Mexico, and Canada were opened to each other under NAFTA in 1994, Mexican exports to Canada and the United States have increased by 225 percent, compared with only 9 percent to the rest of the world. U.S. exports to Mexico have also experienced double-digit growth nearly every year since the implementation of NAFTA, making Mexico our second-largest market in the world after Canada. These exports create American jobs, not just in the border states, but also in cities and towns all over the United States.

Mexico, the United States, and many nations have been challenged by the recent economic slowdown. But there are numerous indications that the world economy is improving. While at times like these it is difficult to contemplate changes, the reforms that we institute today will ensure that we all benefit from the coming upturn. The United States and Mexico should lead together.

To build a strong partnership, we must be strong partners. President Bush has seized the initiative with a package of pro-growth tax reductions. Leaders in Mexico are currently discussing a range of reforms as well, and if implemented properly, both nations will enjoy strong economic growth and job creation in the months and years ahead.

Presidents Bush and Fox will take further steps toward these goals at the Special Summit of the Americas, which will take place in Mexico in early 2004. With the world watching, they will join with the other leaders of the Western Hemisphere in promoting our common future as a community of democracies at peace, with open economies and shared values.

Now is the time for U.S. companies to establish or expand a foothold in the Mexican market. The opportunities are here. The U.S. Commercial Service, through its offices in the United States and Mexico, stands ready to help and support your commercial endeavors. I wish you all great success.

Sincerely,

Antonio O. Garza, Jr.

Sharing More than Just a Border

Strengthening Commercial and Cultural Ties with Mexico

by the U.S. Commercial Service, Mexico

The bilateral relationship of Mexico and the United States is of paramount importance for both countries. It is a complex relationship reflecting cultural differences, economic disparities, mutual interests, shared problems, and growing interdependence. The two countries cooperate on trade, finance, narcotics, immigration, labor, the environment, science, technology, and cultural relations. Beyond these diplomatic and official contacts, extensive networks of commercial, cultural, and educational ties flourish, especially along our 2,000-mile border, where state and local governments as well as citizens' groups closely interact.

The most outstanding feature of this bilateral relationship in the past decade has been the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), which created a free trade region for Mexico, the United States, and Canada. Since the enactment of NAFTA in January 1994, Mexico's imports from the United States have grown exponentially, totaling $98 billion in 2002. The U.S. share of Mexico's trade has likewise increased with NAFTA, accounting for nearly 78 percent of Mexico's total trade in 2002. Mexico is now the second most important U.S. trading partner after Canada. U.S. exports to Mexico are greater than U.S. exports to the rest of Latin America combined.

Mexico's size and diversity is often underappreciated by U.S. exporters. It can be difficult to find a single agent or distributor to cover this vast market. The principal commercial centers of Mexico City, Guadalajara, Monterrey, Ciudad Juarez, and Tijuana each offer a different mix of leading industries and often a distinctive business culture. In addition, a host of secondary commercial centers offer significant market opportunities.

The Mexican legal system differs in many significant ways from the U.S. system. U.S. firms should consult with legal counsel before entering into any business agreements with Mexican partners.

The banking system in Mexico is generally weak and undercapitalized, and interest rates are high. Only about 36 percent of Mexican companies utilize or have access to bank financing. Most importing is conducted on open account. Consequently, U.S. companies need to conduct thorough due diligence before entering into business with a Mexican firm, and should be conservative in extending credit and alert to payment delays.

Mexican customs regulations, product standards, and labor laws may confound U.S. companies. U.S. embassy commercial, agricultural, and labor attachés are available to counsel firms with respect to regulations that affect their particular export product or business interest.

Have patience. Everything takes more time to accomplish in Mexico than what U.S. companies are used to or would like. It is important to take time to develop a personal relationship with a potential business partner—this is the keystone to successfully doing business in Mexico.

NAFTA

TEN YEARS LATER

by Andrew Rudman
Office of the Western Hemisphere, Market Access and Compliance

Since its implementation on January 1, 1994, NAFTA has been more successful than even the most optimistic analysts had predicted. Trade between the United States and Mexico has nearly tripled. The United States now trades more with Mexico in a day than with Paraguay in a whole year, more in a week with Mexico than with Chile in a year, and more in a month with Mexico than with all of the Mercosur countries in a year. In addition to the increased volume and diversity of trade among the NAFTA partners, the economies of Canada, Mexico, and the United States are more closely integrated than ever before, and the private sector is responsible for much of this integration. As we look forward to the next decade of NAFTA, it seems appropriate to ask, "What comes next?"

Following the free trade agreement, some might expect the next step to be a customs union along the lines of the European Union, requiring the three NAFTA countries to surrender autonomy in several key policy areas, including labor and immigration. While the political climate at this time does not appear to support such a bold step, integration within North America will continue to evolve. Sectoral integration, enhanced public-private sector partnerships, and greater policy coordination will all require our attention, even in the absence of an official governmental decision.

NAFTA Certificate of Origin Tool

The International Trade Administration has developed an on-line tool to help U.S. exporters in filling out the North American Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA) Certificate of Origin. The agreement provides important benefits for U.S. goods that are exported to our NAFTA partners, Mexico and Canada. NAFTA-qualifying goods (goods with sufficient North American content) are eligible for lower tariff rates than non-NAFTA goods. The NAFTA Certificate of Origin is used to show customs officials that your product is entitled to preferential tariff rates under NAFTA.

Because filling out the NAFTA certificate can be difficult, the Trade Information Center and the ITA Office of the Chief Information Officer have cooperated in developing this interactive tool to provide U.S. exporters and manufacturers with line-by-line instructions and detailed descriptions of terminology on the certificate. Through the Trade Information Center's on-line NAFTA pages, users of the NAFTA tool are also directed to help in determining Harmonized System numbers, given guidance on establishing preference criteria and finding rules of origin and other NAFTA information, and provided with examples of how products may qualify for preferential tariff treatment. The NAFTA certificate can be filled out on-line and saved for later use.

The NAFTA Certificate of Origin tool can be found on-line through www.export.gov and www.export.gov/tic.

INDUSTRY ADAPTATION

Since NAFTA's implementation, two sectors in particular have taken advantage of tariff provisions to create economies of scale within each market. While integration in the automotive industry predates NAFTA, the tariff elimination schedule contained in the agreement promoted far more extensive expansion of cross-border production in all three countries. In 2002, U.S. shipments of new passenger vehicles and light trucks to Mexico, for example, were 38 times greater than such shipments in 1993. The integration of automotive industries is so complete that there are few if any cars produced in the United States that do not contain Mexican or Canadian parts.

The steel sector also has made use of NAFTA to integrate North American markets. Not only has the industry developed production patterns to maximize the advantages of the North American market, but it also has begun to speak with a single voice when dealing with the various governments. North American steel producers share common concerns and objectives and have worked to influence policy decisions within the region. Governmental cooperation in the OECD steel talks is but one example of this coordinated approach. In fact, in December 2002, the three governments issued a "NAFTA" statement—the first such statement in the history of NAFTA. More recently, the NAFTA Free Trade Commission announced the formation of a North American Steel Trade Commission that will provide opportunities for industry to meet jointly with government officials.

As mentioned previously, the private sector is behind much of the integration in these and other sectors. NAFTA implementation created the conditions for integration, but governments cannot mandate it—rather it must come from the U.S., Mexican, and Canadian private sector. The U.S.-Mexico Partnership for Prosperity (see page 19) is one initiative that fosters integration within North America. It is hoped that this bilateral, largely government-driven partnership, can be expanded to include Canadian participation and would ideally evolve into a private sector-led endeavor.

A third area of regional integration is in policy. As the economies of the United States, Mexico, and Canada continue to integrate, policy decisions facing the three governments should increasingly converge. For example, the need to identify new markets for our "joint" exports will lead to the promotion of North America as one export source, as a producer of high-quality goods and services. This just makes sense from both policy and business perspectives. Over the next decade and beyond, through the continued integration of our economies and the promotion of a common vision, other nations will learn to see North America as a single trading partner, which in turn will bring our countries even closer together.

The Partnership for Prosperity

SPREADING THE BENEFITS OF NAFTA

by Jerry K. Mitchell
U.S. Commercial Service, Mexico

In 2001, Presidents Fox and Bush launched the Partnership for Prosperity, a bilateral initiative to realize the economic potential of all Mexican citizens, particularly those in less developed areas of Mexico. Spreading the benefits of NAFTA to more citizens means greater economic prosperity for all, more purchasing power in all regions of Mexico, and less reason to migrate to large Mexican cities or neighboring countries.

The partnership launched a new era of cooperation between the United States and Mexico. Joined by dozens of U.S. and Mexican government agencies, the partnership has produced many concrete results, led to new opportunities for U.S. businesses, and increasingly involved the private sectors of both countries in corporate responsibility projects.

The goals of the partnership are simple:

- To execute infrastructure projects;
- To create employment, especially among small and medium-sized enterprises through new cooperative ventures with U.S. firms; and
- To implement newer and better ties between Mexican clients and U.S. suppliers.

To achieve the partnership's goals, the U.S. Agency for International Development has initiated a seven-year program, worth $50 million, to strengthen the capacity of educational institutions at the university level. The U.S. Small Business Administration has established small business development centers throughout Mexico to teach the fundamentals of business success to Mexican small businesses. U.S. government agencies have conducted seminars in venture capital, mortgage financing, and electronic commerce, all designed to stimulate productivity and capital markets in order to spread the benefits of NAFTA to more Mexicans.

Perhaps the Partnership for Prosperity has had the most success in creating a more competitive environment in the transmission of funds between the United States and Mexico. In 2002, Mexicans and Mexican-Americans in the United States sent $10 billion home to family members and friends in Mexico. The cost of these remittances as well as the speed, reliability, security, and convenience are factors in the actual amount of money that goes into the hands of the intended recipients. More competition in financial services will lower the related fees and help make sure that more money gets to the people who need it most and strengthen regional economies.

Bilateral Agreement to Pave Way for Full OPIC Activity

The United States and Mexico signed a bilateral agreement in June of this year, which, upon ratification by the Mexican congress, will allow the Overseas Private Investment Corporation to offer all its programs and services in Mexico. Under the agreement, OPIC will initially focus on projects in the education, municipal infrastructure, environmental, housing, and water sectors. The agreement will allow both Mexican and U.S. companies to benefit from the wide variety of financial services offered by OPIC, particularly for small and medium-sized companies.

Remittances are the second-largest source of foreign exchange for Mexico, surpassed only by revenues from oil exports. During the most recent meeting in San Francisco, the U.S. Federal Reserve Bank and the Bank of Mexico announced the establishment of an automated clearinghouse for cross-border transactions. The International Electronic Funds Transfer System will reduce the cost of financial transactions to less than one dollar.

What does this mean for U.S. business? Spreading the benefits of NAFTA to more regions in Mexico increases Mexican purchasing power. This in turn increases business opportunities and trade between our two countries. Under the Partnership for Prosperity, the Export-Import Bank of the United States has extended a $100 million line of credit to the Mexican development bank (Banobras) to finance environmental projects in Mexico. The U.S. Trade and Development Agency is funding feasibility studies in the transportation, energy, and infrastructure

U.S. Department of Commerce

Commerce Secretary Don Evans, joined by Mexico's Secretary of Economic Affairs Fernando Canales during the Partnership for Prosperity event in San Francisco.

sectors, which will increase U.S. exports. The U.S. Overseas Private Investment Corporation has aggressive programs to assist small and medium-sized U.S. companies set up franchises and other business ventures in Mexico in order to help develop local economies.

Some 800 U.S. and Mexican businesses came together in June 2003 in San Francisco to discuss joint opportunities in housing, automotive supply, infrastructure, information technology, and agribusiness. The U.S. Departments of Commerce and State and the Mexican government, under the auspices of the Partnership for Prosperity, organized the conference. As a result, we expect many new business ventures to develop. We can expect another similar conference in 2004 to highlight other key industry and service sectors.

Lastly, as a result of the Partnership for Prosperity, U.S. and Mexican companies are undertaking corporate community projects to help the workers, families, and the communities in which they live and work. Dozens of corporations have stepped forward to provide examples of housing projects, orphanages, and health and safety programs that they sponsor each year. We are encouraging them to expand, replicate, and develop new community-minded programs to show that there is more at work in Mexico than just satisfying the bottom line. The Good Partner Award has been established to recognize corporate efforts in this area.

After 10 years, NAFTA is more than just a trade agreement. Increasingly, Mexico, the United States, and Canada, are becoming integrated into a North American marketplace. To be successful, that integration needs to bring benefits to citizens throughout our countries. The Partnership for Prosperity is designed to do exactly that, while increasing the economic and commercial opportunities available to both U.S. and Mexican firms. ■

Best Prospect Sectors in Mexico

by John D. Breidenstine
U.S. Commercial Service, Mexico

Given the enormous volume of trade between the United States and Mexico, market opportunities exist across the board for internationally competitive U.S. goods and services. The industries briefly detailed in this article are only a sampling of "best prospect sectors." These and other product and service sectors have good growth prospects and account for a large percentage of U.S. exports to Mexico. If a particular sector is not on the list, this does not mean that the product lacks market potential in Mexico. More detailed information on Mexico and industry sectors is available in the *Country Commercial Guide* for Mexico at www.export.gov or www.buyusa.gov/mexico/en.

AFTERMARKET AUTO PARTS

The Mexican automotive parts market grew 6 percent, from \$17.1 billion in 2001 to \$18.2 billion in 2002. The growth was less than expected due to the U.S. economic slowdown, which affected the auto parts industry more than other sectors.

Mexican auto parts and aftermarket auto parts manufacturers and distributors are confident that the sector will increase more than 7 percent during 2003, especially in the aftermarket segment because there has been an increase of some 46 percent in the number of vehicles in circulation since 1997. The increase from 13.9 million in 2001 to 18.4 million cars as of mid-2003 was basically due to the temporary opening of the border to used vehicles over 10 years old. Mexico's total motor vehicle sales reached the 1 million-unit mark in 2002 (including production of 25,000 heavy trucks).

Best prospects for U.S. exports of aftermarket auto parts include rims and tires, chemicals (lubricants, waxes, polishes), sound equipment, engine replacement parts (rings, pistons, carburetor parts, fuel injection parts), air-conditioning parts and accessories, electrical systems, and automatic transmission replacement parts.

ELECTRONIC COMPONENTS

The electronics industry in Mexico is evolving. Fueled by NAFTA, the

industry has moved into new product lines including automotive electronics, network equipment, game consoles, printers, high capacity servers, storage media, and even semiconductor design. As the second most important export industry in Mexico, the electronics industry imports 92 percent of electronic components required, 85 percent of which come from U.S. suppliers. However, more and more components are being imported from other areas of the world, mainly Asia and Eastern Europe.

There are competitive advantages for Mexican electronics firms to import components from U.S. suppliers under NAFTA, including short lead times in transportation, virtually 100 percent duty-free electronic components, and streamlined customs procedures. In addition, NAFTA has led to increased foreign direct investment, and many of the original equipment manufacturers are U.S. investment operations that use U.S. components in their designs. U.S. market share has declined, however, due to the Mexican government's PROSEC program, which established most-favored nation tariffs of 5 percent for many categories of industrial inputs, and eliminated other tariffs, thereby eroding the value of NAFTA duty-free entry for U.S. suppliers.

As a result of the slowdown of the U.S. consumer electronics market, Mexican imports of U.S. components for assembly and re-export decreased significantly in 2002. This trend is expected to continue in the near future until the U.S. economy recovers.

There are two centers for the electronics industry in Mexico—Baja California (Tijuana) and Guadalajara.

LOW INCOME AND PREFABRICATED HOUSING

Low-cost and prefabricated housing initiatives or projects are a priority for the majority of the 32 Mexican states, as well as for the federal government. Governors promote low-cost housing projects, and most of them seek private investment in order to accomplish their goals. The federal and/or local housing government agencies cannot afford to solve the housing deficit by themselves; they need and request the support of private industry.

If a U.S. firm is interested in entering the construction market, the best option is to enter into a joint venture agreement with any of the Mexican firms already established and that play a significant role in the housing industry.

Currently, the market is expected to grow at 4.5 percent during the next three years. In addition, the market is open and Mexican firms are searching for new and rapid construction techniques and new materials (with high quality, low prices, and ease of use and installation). U.S. products and/or services are well accepted in Mexico, and U.S. firms have the additional benefit of selling most products duty- and tax-free.

Official sources estimate that at the end of year 2002, Mexico had a deficit of more than 8 million homes. Major housing construction companies are planning to build over 1 million new, low-end and middle-income homes between 2003 and 2005.

National investment in this sector at the end of 2002 exceeded $110 million, of which investment in construction was more than $43 million. The segments of the market that will demand the most building materials are the lower- and middle-income levels. They are expected to grow at an average of 20 percent and 14 percent respectively during the next three years.

The National Population Council estimates that Mexico will require 30.2 million dwellings by the year 2010. Considering that Mexico has now a stock of 22 million houses according to the census of 2000, this means the requirement of 8.2 million additional housing options in the next eight years.

MEDICAL DEVICES

The Mexican market for medical devices is very dynamic. This is especially true now that President Fox has made it a priority to improve the quality of the health care services offered by public institutions and to create new programs and systems for people not covered by social security and who do not have the resources to look for care at private hospitals.

At the same time, the government is implementing new regulations for hospital certification that force all private hospitals and clinics to have the appropriate resources for the kind of service they offer.

As part of these policies, the public sector is replacing obsolete equipment, building and equipping new hospitals and clinics, and purchasing equipment for those units that did not have enough resources. The private health care sector is also remodeling existing clinics and replacing obsolete equipment, and it is also building new hospitals and clinics nationwide.

Under NAFTA, most equipment and medical devices of U.S. origin can be imported duty-free into Mexico.

For product-specific market information about these and other sectors, please visit www.export.gov or www.buyusa.gov/mexico/en and consult Mexico's *Country Commercial Guide*, Industry Sector Analysis and International Market Insight reports, and other market research. Alternatively, you may want to contact the U.S. Commercial Service in Mexico at +52-55-5140-2600 and ask to speak to a sector specialist. For information on food and agricultural best prospects, please visit www.fas-la.com/mexico or contact the Agricultural Trade Office at +52-55-5280-5291 or e-mail atomexico@usda.gov.

RESOURCES

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Making Money South of the Border

SMALLER COMPANIES FIND SUCCESS

by Rebecca Balogh
U.S. Commercial Service, Mexico

Since the implementation of NAFTA in 1994, the United States has experienced double-digit growth nearly every year in its exports to Mexico. Of course, much of this export success is due to the participation of large firms in infrastructure and other major projects. However, small and medium-sized businesses have been increasingly successful in this market, both as suppliers to the *maquiladora* sector near Mexico's border with the United States, and as exporters of products sold throughout Mexico.

In recent months, a number of small businesses have made impressive sales to distributors and end users in Mexico. For example, Second Chance Body Armor, of Michigan, sold armored vests to a Mexican state police force; Seal King North America, South Carolina, sold double-sided adhesive tape to a Mexican distributor; and, Sea Sweep, Inc., Colorado, sold pollution control equipment to Pemex, the government-owned petroleum company. While many other U.S. small businesses have found distributors and agents or won contracts, we would like to highlight one case that shows how a partnership between public and government entities can help U.S. companies of all sizes succeed in challenging markets like Mexico.

WORKING TOGETHER

DentalEZ of Malvern, Pa., had already been selling its dental equipment and instruments in Mexico for nearly 20 years, but was suddenly shut out of a government tender. DentalEZ has been a client of the Philadelphia U.S. Export Assistant Center (USEAC) for many years, working to export its products to Mexico and other countries around the world. In May 2003, following the advice of the USEAC and its Mexican lawyer, DentalEZ sought out the services of the Commercial Service in Mexico to raise its concerns about the Mexican Institute of Social Security (IMSS). IMSS had disqualified DentalEZ from participating in a multimillion dollar tender without providing sufficient explanation.

Working closely with DentalEZ, Alicia Herrera of the Commercial Service in Mexico alerted a number of key Mexican officials of the possibility of unfair treatment. During the next six months and after substantial consultation among a wide array of U.S. and Mexican officials, IMSS not only readmitted DentalEZ to the tendering process, but also awarded the company a purchase order for several hundred complete dental workstations.

This and other experiences of U.S. companies, large and small, show that no matter what foreign market has piqued one's interest, patience and persistence are the keys to success. As one successful U.S. exporter, Bob de Pena of Second Chance Body Armor emphasizes: "I hear about a lot of U.S. companies that say they come to Mexico but don't get immediate sales. You can't come and just leave your fax number and expect people to respond. You have to pay attention to the market and be committed to it. Like anywhere in the world, you have to develop the market and have a presence there. If you do that, the rewards will follow."

Communication is another key factor to success in the Mexican market, both with your customer (or potential buyer) and with the Commercial Service offices in Mexico. Penelope Martinez of the Mexico City office comments, "We have had a very close working relationship with Second Chance. It really has been a win-win situation. The company kept me informed about what it was doing so we could stay engaged and help whenever necessary. As a result of our successful relationship, Second Chance is now working closely with the Export Assistance Center in Houston and our Commercial Service operations throughout Central America to enter the markets there."

Trade Events

YOUR DOOR TO SALES IN MEXICO

by Bryan Larson

U.S. Commercial Service, Mexico

With U.S. Commercial Service support, even companies that have never visited Mexico can take advantage of the opportunities that locally based trade events offer. These events enable a U.S. firm to meet potential customers, agents, distributors, and representatives, learn more about the market for its products and services, realize direct sales, raise the company's profile, and demonstrate its commitment to the market and its customers.

Through exhibitions, trade missions, and promotional seminars, the U.S. Commercial Service in Mexico supports U.S. companies in a variety of ways.

Study USA at Universitarea: Education and Training
Mexico City, Nov. 28–30, 2003. Contact Martha.Sanchez@mail.doc.gov

Las Americas Security Show
Mexico City, Jan. 28–30, 2004. Contact Penelope.Martinez@mail.doc.gov

EXPO COMM Mexico: Telecommunications, the Internet, and Networking
Mexico City, Feb. 10–13, 2004. Contact Angeles.Avila@mail.doc.gov

Expo Vacaciones: Tourism
Mexico City, Feb. 16–18, 2004. Contact Juan.Carlos@mail.doc.gov

Expo Manufactura: Manufacturing
Monterrey, March 2–4, 2004. Contact Josefina.Martinez@mail.doc.gov

Exintex: Textiles and Textile Manufacturing Equipment
Puebla, March 9–12, 2004. Contact MariCarmen.Campos@mail.doc.gov

EXHIBITIONS

The support provided to U.S. firms at exhibitions in Mexico can range from a market briefing to directly recruiting and supporting a group of U.S. exhibitors in a U.S. pavilion. U.S. pavilions organized by the Commercial Service in Mexico at local exhibitions are becoming increasingly popular for good reason. U.S. company participants receive greater visibility, greater access to key decision-makers, and significant logistical support. Best of all, the price is right; it is the same as or slightly higher than any other similar-sized booth at a show. At a few exhibitions, we also offer a catalog show option called a product literature center. For a fraction of the cost of exhibiting at a show, your company's product literature will be displayed and distributed and any trade leads collected. This is a great way to participate in an event that you might otherwise miss.

TRADE MISSIONS

Every year, the Commercial Service in Mexico supports a number of trade missions made up of U.S. companies and usually led by high-level U.S. federal or state government officials. We arrange meetings with Mexican government officials and company representatives, conduct market briefings, and host U.S. embassy networking receptions. Trade missions offer participants highly visibility and, consequently, significant attention from high-level, public and private sector decision-makers. In addition, U.S. participants are able to accomplish a great deal in a very short amount of time.

PROMOTIONAL SEMINARS

What if there is not a trade mission or exhibition in Mexico that fits your company's interests or schedule? Our answer is the single company promotion, a stand-alone event that we can organize and host. We can provide companies with as little or as much logistical support as they need. One of the greatest benefits that companies derive from this service is the interest that a U.S. embassy-hosted event generates in Mexico.

For a complete list of events, products, and services, visit www.export.gov or www.buyusa.gov/mexico/en.